

**If you need to talk with your counselor at any time during your rehabilitation, you should feel free to contact him or her. Open communication with one another is important. If something happens that slows down your progress, contact your counselor immediately. You most likely will have important information to share. There may be some reasonable accommodations, equipment or services that could help you resolve the problem(s).**

### **Getting and Keeping a Job**

As the services in your IPE come to a close, you and your counselor will be discussing going to work. During this time, you will be preparing to go on job interviews, designing a resume and learning techniques about interviewing for a job. You and your counselor will work together in this very important step - getting a job!

### **How Do I Keep My Job?**

If you have difficulty on the job, notify your counselor immediately so that he or she can assist you. Your counselor will assist you with any difficulties such as: transportation, reasonable accommodations, additional training and support services like job coaching to help you on the job. It is important that you understand what your employer expects of you and if you choose to disclose your disability, that your employer understands how your disability affects your performance.

### **How Will This Affect My Benefits?**

Information concerning such benefits as Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), Transitional Assistance to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC), Food Stamps, Personal Assistance Services (PAS), health benefits, and other benefits are areas where your counselor can assist you.



## **Consumer Handbook**

### **Vocational Rehabilitation Program**

### **Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission**

## MASSACHUSETTS REHABILITATION COMMISSION



### Mission Statement

The purpose of the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission is to provide comprehensive services to people with disabilities which will maximize their quality of life and economic self-sufficiency in the community.

This is accomplished through the multiple programs of the MRC: Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services, Community Services (CS) and Disability Determination Services (DDS).

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal mandate which, in part, prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities when getting and keeping employment. Massachusetts state law also prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities when getting and keeping employment.

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MRC is grateful for the dedication of all of the Handbook Committee members for their hard work on this important project.

**What is an Individual Plan for Employment (IPE)? It is a document in which you and your counselor list your employment goal and what services MRC can provide to help you to become employed. It is an agreement between you and the MRC-VR Program. When you agree to this goal, you and your counselor must both sign the IPE. You will receive a copy of the IPE and should keep it for your records.**

The Individual Plan for Employment (IPE) which you and your counselor have developed together outlines your employment goal and the specific individual services which you will need to get and keep a job.

These services may be provided directly by the MRC-VR Program, purchased for you, or arranged for you with other organizations. By the time you are ready to sign your IPE you will know your exact employment goal and what services you will be receiving that are included in your plan.

#### **REMINDER BEFORE SIGNING:**

**IF YOU DISAGREE WITH ANY PARTS OF YOUR INDIVIDUAL PLAN FOR EMPLOYMENT (IPE), YOU AND YOUR COUNSELOR SHOULD DISCUSS THESE DISAGREEMENTS.**

**YOU ALWAYS HAVE THE RIGHT TO APPEAL.**

### **Following Your Plan for Employment**

Once you and your counselor sign your IPE, the next steps are carried out as defined in your plan. As you begin to work toward your goal of getting a job, you and your counselor will meet periodically to discuss your progress and to discuss anything about your rehabilitation.

- A. Waiting List for Paid Services: sometimes the MRC-VR Program has a waiting list for services the agency needs to purchase. Your counselor will inform you whether or not there is a wait for any of the services you might be seeking.
- B. Financial Need: the MRC-VR Program must ask you about any income you have to determine if you can assist in paying for any of your services. If you are dependent on your parents for income or if you are married, your parents' or spouse's income may also be considered.

During the planning process, your counselor will ask for your cooperation in seeking other funding that might help pay for some of your services, such as financial aid for schools and MassHealth to cover medical costs.

### **“Informed Choice” Decision Making**

You will be asked to make decisions about choosing what kind of job you want and what services you need to get and keep that job. Informed Choice means that you have obtained all the information you need to make choices and decisions for yourself about the job you want and the services you need. Your counselor will be very helpful to you in gathering all the information you need. Your counselor will also assist you in making decisions if you need help. Basically, you and your counselor will work as partners throughout the rehabilitation process by gathering information and helping you in your decision-making about job goals and service options.

It is most important to know about all the services that are available for you to get and keep a job. If you are found eligible, you and your counselor will explore the various services to help you know more about your strengths and weaknesses.

### **Individual Plan for Employment (IPE)**

Developing and agreeing on an IPE is the most important time for you. The more you know about your strengths, the more you will be able to make good informed decisions about your future at work. **(Your IPE charts the course of your services and must be the result of work by you and your counselor.)**

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# **Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) Public Vocational Rehabilitation Program Consumer Handbook**

- Do you have difficulty obtaining a job?
- Do you have difficulty keeping a job?

The MRC Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program works with people to help them obtain and retain employment.

## **Who Can Receive Services?**

To receive vocational rehabilitation services from the MRC-VR Program, you must:

1. have a physical, mental, emotional or learning disability(ies) which severely limits your ability to get and keep a job.
2. have a desire to work and keep a job.
3. be of legal working age.

## **How Do I Get A Referral?**

People with disabilities come to the MRC-VR Program from any variety of sources or you can refer yourself.

## **How Do I Prepare For The First Interview?**

To get started, please:

1. Call and/or visit a MRC-VR office.
2. Attend an orientation provided at an office.
3. Fill out the “VR CHECKLIST” found in the center of this Handbook, if possible. (See Appendix C)

## **How Does My Rehabilitation Begin?**

Soon after your referral is received at an MRC-VR office, you will be contacted by a VR staff person or counselor who will work with you. He or she will send you a letter giving the date and time of

You and your counselor will explore goals, expectations, skills, education, experience, medical conditions and anything else that may be keeping you from working.

Your counselor may want to obtain more records from other agencies or organizations with which you may have worked. Remember that all this information will be very helpful as you develop your work goals.

## **Becoming Eligible for Services**

Within 60 days after you have signed your application, you will be notified in writing that you are either eligible or ineligible to receive services.

When you are notified of your eligibility, you will also be assigned to a priority category. Priority categories are based on how significant your disability is and your barriers to employment. Only individuals who are eligible and are in the top priority category can receive the full range of MRC-VR services.

If you are not in the top priority category, you will receive referral and information services only. You can also appeal your priority category assignment if you believe it is incorrect. You may then contact the MRC Ombudsperson and/or the Client Assistance Program (CAP) in the Massachusetts Office on Disability (see page 8). **You have the right to appeal the eligibility decision, as well as any other decisions, through an Administrative Review, Mediation and/or Fair Hearing processes.**

## **What's the Next Step?**

You and your counselor will begin a series of appointments. Every service that is provided is based on your skills, ability, needs and preferences.

As the planning process begins, your counselor will discuss with you two other considerations:

In addition to learning more about you, the counselor will tell you more about the MRC-VR Program, such as:

- determining how a person becomes eligible for services,
- describing what the vocational rehabilitation process includes,
- explaining the types of services possible,
- stating your rights and responsibilities and answering any questions you might ask.

### **Applying For Services**

At the end of your first interview, if you believe the services of the MRC-VR Program will help lead you to a job, you may choose to sign an application for services.

### **What Happens Next?**

Your VR counselor's first task, after you have formally applied for services, is to determine if you are eligible to receive services from the MRC-VR Program. Being determined eligible is not automatic. The VR counselor needs to gather a variety of information to determine the nature of your disability(ies) and the barrier(s) to employment, as well as determine whether you can benefit from vocational rehabilitation services. In order for the counselor to gather this information, he or she may ask you to give written permission to collect diagnostic information about you. The information the counselor gathers is strictly confidential and is shared only with those who are directly concerned with your vocational rehabilitation. While this information is necessary to determine your eligibility, it is also very useful information for you and your counselor to decide what services will be best for you as you both develop a rehabilitation plan, should you be determined eligible.

Another piece of the eligibility determination is your availability to receive VR services, either by being close to graduating from high school or of working age.

### **What Will We Talk About?**

your appointment and with the name of a vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselor whom you will meet. If the date and/or time are inconvenient, please call the counselor who sent you the letter to arrange for a more convenient appointment, including information regarding the best way you can be reached.

A vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselor will meet with you at the designated time. He or she is a highly qualified professional who is trained to work with persons with disabilities to develop a plan to meet specific career goals, such as yours. The VR counselor will work with you and list your strengths, identify any limitations, discuss the barriers to employment presented by your disability, determine with you the services necessary to help you achieve your goals and assist you in entering or re-entering the world of work.

It will be very helpful to bring recent medical, school and other records with you to the first appointment, along with your completed VR CHECKLIST, if possible.

### **Preparing For the First Interview**

It will also be very helpful to you and your counselor if you prepare ahead of time to discuss certain information about your background. Your counselor will need to know some facts about your disability such as dates of any hospitalizations, specialty examinations, clinic visits, or anything else about the nature of your disability. You may bring someone along with you to this meeting, if you wish.

**The VR CHECKLIST found in the center of this Handbook might be useful to help you to organize this information.**

Because vocational rehabilitation is ultimately about jobs, your counselor will need to know about any work history or special skills you might have. School records, job history, training or other information will be very helpful. Don't worry if you have never worked. Many people with disabilities seek assistance from the MRC-VR Program to enter the world of work for the first time.